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SOCIAL, HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS:
ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Statement submitted by Franciscans International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, Category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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There are more 1 million Franciscan women and men, who are found in almost every country in the world. We follow an 800-year tradition, begun by Saint Francis of Assisi (Italy), that emphasizes a simple lifestyle, with works of direct service to the poor and needy, a great love for creation and a firm commitment to making peace among all peoples.

Franciscans International welcomes this opportunity to comment on the report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 (E/1996/16). We appreciate the thoroughness of the report, integrating as it does key objectives from recent world conferences with those of the Beijing Platform for Action. 1/

Informed, inter alia, by many of our Franciscans in the field, we wish to recommend that the following three fundamental objectives be emphasized to the fullest extent throughout the United Nations system:

(a) Recalling the statement made during the current session of the Council by the representative of the World Bank that the best investment a developing country can make today is in the education of the girl child, we emphasize, with reference to paragraph 60 of the ACC report, that countries in which women are

at a serious disadvantage compared with men should continue to commit 60 per cent of programme resources to targeting women and girls in order to increase girls' attendance at school to 50 per cent;

(b) Recalling, as stated in paragraph 38 of the Beijing Platform for Action, that discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life, we emphasize, with reference to paragraph 234 of the ACC report, that better accounting should be taken of recent changes in the sex ratio at birth in relation to prenatal sex selection. We further recommend that the concept of son preference be addressed directly as a harmful attitude and practice and linked with female infanticide, as it was in paragraphs 259 and 277 (c) of the Beijing Platform for Action;

(c) The free market is no longer free or viable. The free market or world economy - that relies on unsustainable first world consumption, unregulated transnational corporations, maquiladoras or virtual slave labour, and a third world debt based largely on military spending, and has produced a worldwide recession, with 1 billion people, of whom the overwhelming majority are women, living in abject poverty - needs to be critically re-examined. Within the parameters of research and analysis concerning the effects of the internationalization and globalization of economies, including technological change, we recommend, with reference to paragraph 131 of the ACC report, that a critique be made of the free market system itself so as to contribute to the formulation of world economies that are sustainable as well as sustained.

Notes

1/ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.